

Message Text

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SUBJECT: EDITORIAL IN IRISH TIMES APRIL 25, 1978

FOLLOWING EDITORIAL APPEARED IN IRISH TIMES APRIL
25, 1978 UNDER HEADING QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS:

THE CASE OF THE SOUTH KOREAN BOEING 707 AIRLINER IS
MADE UP OF A CONSTELLATION OF MYSTERIES RATHER
THAN A SINGLE RIDDLE. WITHOUT THE CO-OPERATION
OF THE RUSSIANS - WHO, UP TO THE TIME OF WRITING,
HAVE KEPT SILENT - SPECULATION RULES. UNTIL THE
PILOT AND NAVIGATOR ARE RELEASED FROM SOVIET
DETENTION, TOGETHER WITH THE BOEING'S BLACK BOX,
WHICH KEEPS A COMPREHENSIVE RECORD OF IN-FLIGHT
PROCEDURE, THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ARE
UNANSWERABLE. BUT SOME OF THEM ARE OF GREAT
INTEREST AND SIGNIFICANCE.

IT IS CONCEDED THAT THE AIRCRAFT HAD STRAYED BY
AS MUCH AS A THOUSAND MILES FROM HER FLIGHT-PATH
OVER THE TRANS-POLAR ROUTE FROM PARIS TO SEOUL.
IT IS ALSO ADMITTED THAT SHE WAS NOT CARRYING THE
LATEST NAVIGATIONAL EQUIPMENT. AS AGAINST THAT,
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THE CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR WERE HIGHLY EXPERIENCED
AT THEIR TRADE, AND HAD MADE THE JOURNEY
FREQUENTLY. AN OFFICIAL OF THE AIRLINE SAID
YESTERDAY THAT HE WAS PUZZLED BY THE SIZE OF THE
ERROR, WHICH, IN HIS OPINION, COULD HAVE BEEN
DETECTED BROADLY BY RESORT TO THE OLD-FASHIONED
SEXTANT, STILL IN USE, PARTICULARLY IN THE

ARCTIC SKY, WHERE THE MAGNETIC PROPERTIES OF THE POLE ARE APT TO INVALIDATE THE COMPASS READINGS.

ON THE SOVIET SIDE, ANOTHER CROP OF CONUNDRUMS SPRINGS UP. THE REASON FOR INTERCEPTION IS OBVIOUS ENOUGH. THE BOEING HAD WANDERED INTO WHAT IS KNOWN TO BE ONE OF THE MOST HIGHLY SECRET AND MILITARILY SENSITIVE PARTS OF THE USSR. THERE ARE FEW COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD - CERTAINLY NOT A SUPER-POWER - WHICH WOULD NOT REACT IMMEDIATELY TO SUCH PENETRATION. THERE IS NOTHING SURPRISING IN THE USE OF INTERCEPTOR FIGHTERS TO INVESTIGATE ANY INTRUDER, OR TO ESCORT IT TO A LANDING-STRIP FOR EXAMINATION. THERE ARE INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED TECHNIQUES DESIGNED TO AVOID DANGER.

SO FAR, THERE HAS BEEN NO REPORT OF ANY RADIO CONTACT BETWEEN THE BOEING AND THE FIGHTERS, OR BETWEEN THE BOEING AND LOCAL GROUND INSTALLATIONS. SOME OF THE PASSENGERS THINK THEY SAW ONE OF THE FIGHTERS WAGGLING ITS WINGS IN A POSSIBLE SIGNAL: OTHERS SAY THAT THE FIRST THEY KNEW OF THE CRISIS WAS WHEN BULLETS TORE INTO THE REAR OF THE AIRCRAFT, KILLING TWO PASSENGERS AND WOUNDING OTHERS.

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THE USE OF GUNFIRE WILL NEED SOME EXPLAINING: THE BOEING COULD EASILY HAVE GONE DOWN WITH THE LOSS OF ITS ENTIRE COMPLEMENT. AGAIN, IF THE RUSSIANS HAD INTENDED TO SHOOT IT DOWN, THEY SURELY WOULD HAVE DONE SO, UNAMBIGUOUSLY. WERE THE INTERCEPTOR PILOTS SO OVERCOME BY THE AST ZNDING

PRESENCE OF THE AIRCRAFT THAT THEY WERE AT A LOSS WHAT TO DO? IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE BOEING HAS INADVERTENTLY SHOWN UP A CRITICAL GAP IN WHAT MOSCOW REGARDED AS FAIL-SAFE DEFENCES? THAT WOULD CERTAINLY CAUSE UTTER CONFUSION - AND SUSPICION OF THE BOEING'S MOTIVES. OJ WAS THE BOEING THE VICTIM OF A NAVIGATIONAL BEAM-BENDING EXPERIMENT BY THE RUSSIAN MILITARY? THE SOVIET UNION WILL HAVE TO COME UP WITH AN EXPLANATION SOONER OR LATER. WILL IT BE THE TRUE ONE? KRENE

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